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By Kenneth Kelty, with Seb Prohn

I am a student at Western Carolina University where I am a part of the University Participant (UP) Program. I want to share my thoughts and experiences about inclusion in college. To me, inclusion means that all people should be allowed to live fully without limitations and go places just as everyone else gets to go—like college! Inclusion is important because it gives people with intellectual and developmental disability (ID) a chance to do all the same things as everyone else with nothing holding them back.

There have been times in my life when I felt left out. When I was in the 5th grade, I was a member of the school safety patrol. Each year the school would take a group of safety patrol students to Washington, D.C. to see the sights and have fun, but because of my autism and ID the school did not want me to participate. I was excluded.

This made me sad because I really wanted to go to Washington, D.C. with my friends. I was also mad because they would not let me go even though I could do almost anything the other kids could do. In the end I got to go because my mom challenged the school. She let them know what I wanted everyone to know: I should not be denied an opportunity because of my disabilities.

To me, inclusion means that all people should be allowed to live fully without limitations and go places just as everyone else gets to go—like college!

A lot has changed in the last decade. I've gone from others wanting to leave me out to being invited to speak at the 2013 American Evaluation Association conference in Washington, D.C. When I speak at conferences, I try to spread awareness about including people with ID on college campuses and in communities.

At Western Carolina University (WCU), I took part in a social inclusion research project. Now I use my data—pictures I took on my college campus—as a way to reach out to others about the ways I feel very included on my campus. In this story I want to do the same thing and explain the ways I feel included, with the hopes that you will make your campuses and communities more inclusive.



This was the night that Vince first said “you are one of the brothers.”

Academic Inclusion

At WCU, I take the same classes as all other college students. If I need to, I can go to the office of disability services and they help me access accommodations. In college classes, I do the same work as all of my peers. It was my choice to enroll in the four college classes I am taking right now, which are Global Issues, Facebook Generation Marketing, Career Exploration, and Foundations of Communication.

Each of my professors includes me personally. They want me to participate in their classes and they want to help out. In my communications class, the professor asks me if I understand the topic and makes sure I have a partner for projects. Also, my past and current professors know my name. They will say “Hi!” if they see me around campus.

My classmates include me by introducing me to people they know in the class, and when we are working on assignments together we help each other out. Over the semesters some of my classmates have become friends, and instead of just doing academic work together, we now just hang out and share meals together.

Work Inclusion

Every semester I've been in college I've had several jobs at WCU. I've worked in the campus mailroom, the International Studies office, enTOURage (a group of student guides hired by the Office of Admissions to give tours to prospective students), the Severe Disabilities Grant office, and campus creative services. In each of these jobs my co-workers always made sure I understood everything and we all worked

together as a team. My co-workers introduced me to other students and employees in education, psychology, and the study abroad program.

It felt good when each of my jobs let me do the same work as other student employees, whether I was running errands, sorting mail, answering telephones, or taking pictures of out-of-date campus logos. In all of these jobs I got to express my opinions and meet new people. As a tour guide, I lead campus tours and teach future students about the university. I share what it is like being a college student, and I get to be an official representative of the university. I heard about my jobs through networking with others on campus and my job coach.

Social Inclusion

Attending WCU has given me more independence and new experiences. Being five hours away from home has forced me to make new friends and connections. I meet people at events and programs in our residence halls. I live in the same dorms as my college peers. Everyone on our floor says “Hi,” and the RAs (residence advisors) are all really nice. I also meet new people through the friends I have on campus. We might be hanging out, getting a meal, or at a social event and my friends will often bring some of their other friends too. Volleyball games, classes, and festivals are all places where I’ve met other students who became good friends.



Homecoming football game of 2012, with Brian, Vince and Ed from Delta Sigma.

Another way I’ve made new friends is by joining social clubs on campus. I am a member of the International Studies Club, the Asian Student Association, and the campus diversity committee. I am also involved in Greek life on campus. The name of my fraternity is Delta Sigma Phi. They have been very supportive and make me feel like I am one of their brothers. Delta Sigma Phi stands for “better men, better lives.” I chose this fraternity because

they encourage us to do work in the community, and because of the diversity of our members.

It was through community service where I first met a Delta Sigma fraternity brother, Vince. Both of us were volunteering with a group that helps younger students on the autism spectrum learn better social skills. I also knew the fraternity’s vice president through my job giving campus tours, and everything came together when I asked if they ever thought of working with the UP Program. Next thing I knew I was asked to come and speak to the fraternity! Two weeks before “rush” I had already become a part of the Delta Sigma family.

For me, inclusion is a lot like social justice—it is about having the same options and opportunities as everyone else. Because I’ve been included at WCU, I’ve met a variety of wonderful people. I’ve also had the chance to educate others about the wide range of personalities and abilities found among individuals labeled with ID.

The truth is, equal options and opportunities are still not widely available. I had to travel over five hours from my home to feel included on a college campus. I have met other students with ID who have traveled to different states or even across the country looking for inclusive campuses. No one should have to travel to find inclusion! Everyone should feel included in any college, community, or town.

Before Thanksgiving break I gave a persuasive speech in my communications class. I wanted to explain the benefits of inclusion to my classmates. One thing I told them is that communities earn reputations for being inclusive. Families want to move to inclusive communities so their children can grow up with diverse friends. College is pretty much the same. WCU is becoming known for its inclusive campus, and people want to be here because of that. I hope that you’ll make your communities and colleges more inclusive too, because everyone involved will benefit!

Author Information

Kenneth Keltz: Kenneth is currently completing his second year in Western Carolina University’s UP Program. His studies have focused on political science and criminal justice. After graduation in May 2014, Kenneth would like to travel abroad before settling down in an apartment and working in an office.

Seb Prohn: Seb is the UP Program’s faculty liaison and outreach coordinator. He has enjoyed his opportunities to research, evaluate, and present with Kenneth—especially on the topic of social inclusion in college.